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JAZZ APPRECIATION MONTH Fact sheet



- Jazz is an indigenous American art form that was born of and celebrates diversity in the US cultural context.
- Jazz has been called the purest expression of American democracy, a music built on individualism and compromise.
- The term was only applied to music around 1915 and was even then disliked by some musicians because it was a vulgar term for sexual intercourse.
- The importance of individuality and improvisatory interaction in jazz, requiring mastery of expression and technical skill, should not be underestimated.
- Like the blues, jazz was at first an oral tradition founded by African Americans as a passionate expression of social conditions, combining both African American and European American influences.
- New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz, was a slave trade port, and its Congo Square was a gathering place on Sundays for the African Americans who danced, sang of their history and ritual with expressive African inflections, and played drums.
- The four periods of jazz history:

The Jazz Age and Modernity (1920s)

The Jazz age characterized the sound of modernity because it emphasized the individual voice and had a great impact on genres and styles in the visual arts, including films, and modernist literature. Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five (1925) are often credited with exemplifying the spirit of the era.

The Big-Band Swing Era (1930-1940s)

Some believe that the big band at its peak represented the golden era of jazz because it became part of the cultural mainstream. Others, however, consider it furthest from the ideal of jazz's artistic individuality. Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman and Count Basie lead successful orchestras that characterized the New York jazz scene during the Great Depression.

Bebop, Post-Bop, Hard Bop, and Free Jazz (1940s-1950s)

Post-World War II jazz contrasted with the big bands and had parallels with abstract expressionist painters and Beat writers. The new style was more harmonically challenging, maintained a high level of virtuosity, and pushed the established language to its extremes. Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie "Bird" Parker, and Stan Getz played in this new style.

Postmodern Jazz Since 1980

Hybridity, a greater degree of fusion, and traditional jazz revivals merely touch the surface of the variety of styles that make up contemporary jazz. Inclusive of many types of world music, it is accessible, socially conscious, and draws almost equally from its vast musical past. Performers such as David Grisman, B.B. King, Wynton Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr., Toshiko Akiyoshi, and Tito Puente attest to this variety.

